



# NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.  
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

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## **FCC REPORTS SHOW ANALOG AND DIGITAL COVERAGE OF TV STATIONS**

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) today released two reports that show changes in the coverage of the nation’s full-power television (TV) stations as they prepare to transition from analog to digital broadcasting on February 17, 2009. The FCC initiated this side-by-side comparison to proactively identify the changes associated with the switch to digital broadcasting by TV stations and share the information with viewers throughout the country.

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin said, “These reports provide information about changes in coverage of each station as they transition from analog to digital service. These changes in coverage are the result of decisions extending back more than 10 years. In most cases, changes in coverage are due to choices made by broadcasters.”

“It is critical that broadcasters use the information in these reports to inform their viewers about how changes in their coverage may affect them,” stated Chairman Martin. “We expect broadcasters to make this information readily available and include it in all of their DTV educational materials.”

The DTV transition is the result of a complex planning process that began more than 10 years ago. Although the Commission tried to maximize the ability of TV stations to replicate their analog coverage area as closely as possible, TV stations were not required to do so. Indeed, it has always been recognized that some stations and viewers would experience changes in their coverage as a result of the nationwide transition.

As early as 1997, in adopting the initial DTV Table of Allotments, the Commission observed that not all stations would replicate their existing coverage area. In fact, the Commission observed that 93 percent of all stations received a channel that provided at least 95 percent service area replication.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Sixth Report and Order*, MM Docket No. 87-268, 12 FCC Rcd 14588 at ¶ 78 (1997). In addition, the DTV Table of Allotments in Appendix B of the subsequent Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration of the Sixth Report and Order showed that the difference in the match between the analog and digital service areas of many stations was 2% or more.

Similarly, in 2001, the Commission noted in the First DTV Periodic Review of the DTV transition that, "...each DTV channel allotment was chosen to best allow its DTV service to match the Grade B service contour of the [analog] station with which it was paired."<sup>2</sup> The Commission concluded: "After considering the comments, and balancing the arguments for and against, we have decided not to require replication. . . . To require NTSC service replication by DTV stations under these circumstances would indeed be premature, would cause excessive additional expense to both commercial and noncommercial broadcasters alike, and could delay the transition."<sup>3</sup>

The first report provides maps showing the analog and digital coverage areas for each of the 1749 full-power TV stations in the United States. The vast majority of TV stations throughout the country will experience a significant increase in the population that can receive their signals. Some stations, however, are expected to experience some losses in the population that will be served by digital service as compared to their existing analog service.

The first report found that approximately 89 percent of stations (1,553 stations) will experience an overall net gain in the population that can receive their signals. Approximately 11 percent of stations (196 stations) will have an overall net loss in television viewers. The first report includes a separate map showing the predicted coverage areas for every station and shows the areas of gain or loss.

The second report contains maps and other information for the 319 stations where more than two percent of the population covered by their analog service will not be covered by their digital service. The population losses shown on the maps actually overstate the loss as it includes people who currently receive TV broadcasting service via cable or satellite, which accounts for about 85 percent of all viewers (*i.e.*, only a small fraction of the viewers counted actually rely exclusively on over-the-air signals for television reception) and include people who may be receiving service from TV translators. It is also important to note that in all of these circumstances the community of license remains covered and it is predominantly viewers who live outside the actual community of license (in some cases in neighboring communities) who may lose coverage.

The second report includes two maps and two associated population lists for each station. The first map shows the station's predicted population coverage gains and losses due to a change in the service area. The maps illustrate situations in which the station has shifted its coverage, either by a change in the transmitter location, antenna pattern, power, or some combination of these factors. Approximately 11 percent (or 196) stations are predicted to experience some existing population coverage loss of two percent or more as a result of changes in their service area.

The second map shows the station's complete coverage gains and losses, including losses inside the service area due to the digital "cliff effect". The digital cliff effect occurs where a station's signal is predicted not to be strong enough for reception due to various technical factors associated with the DTV transition. An additional seven percent (or 123) stations are predicted to experience some existing population coverage loss of two percent when including both losses due to changes in coverage and as a result of technical differences in their digital signal (digital cliff effect).

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<sup>2</sup> *First DTV Periodic Report and Order*, released January 19, 2001, 16 FCC Rcd 5946 at ¶ 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

The Commission has taken and continues to take action to make every resource available for broadcasters to mitigate any lost service to consumers. Stations that are predicted to lose viewers have several options for restoring service, including use of so-called “translators” (including on-channel Distributed Transmission Systems (DTS) or “fill-in” stations that operate on a different channel); use of another station’s sub-channel to be transmitted via multicasting; maximizing the station’s power; changing the station’s channel; or changing the antenna pattern.

Today the Commission released a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that would create a new “replacement” digital television translator service to permit full-service television stations to continue to provide service to loss areas that have occurred as a result of their digital transition. This initiative would also allow broadcasters to apply for special temporary authority to use such translators while the rulemaking is pending.

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